

Ms. NORTON. I thank the gentlewoman for her efforts to make our caucus truly bipartisan, because it certainly takes hard work. We iron out our differences and go ahead. On things we disagree, those do not become caucus issues.

On choice, for example, there are some Members, Democrat and Republican, that are not with us on choice. Therefore, we do not worry with that in the caucus. Those of who are strongly pro-choice will do it on our own or with other Members.

Mr. Speaker, let me finish by saying that the two other groundbreaking approaches the women's caucus has used this session are town meetings and women's caucus hearings. We had a town meeting on pay equity, because we have found that that is a number one issue for women and families. That was a meeting where we did not do most of the talking. We invited women from around the country to do most of the talking. Most of those women came from operations like the business and professional women's clubs of America. It was an important innovation for the women's caucus.

We have had four women's caucus hearings. I mentioned some of the team members. Those hearings have been on zero to 3, the groundbreaking work that has been done on what we all had better understand about young children and what has to be done. It is to far more adequately stimulate them and get child care for them.

I have mentioned contraceptive research. We have to move ahead on that or else we are inviting more abortion. This last year was the 25th anniversary of Title IX. We had a hearing to commemorate it and to indicate the great unsolved issues under Title IX, and of course I have mentioned the procurement hearing because while there is a 5 percent goal, a voluntary goal, for women for contracts from the Federal Government, we are only at 2 percent. The women's caucus hearing brought that out.

Mr. Speaker I appreciate the time that has been awarded to the 50 Members of Congress for this special order.

HONORING WAYNE FOWLER FOR HIS 32 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, this is a labor of love for me, because it is a privilege for me to rise this afternoon to honor my constituent, Wayne Fowler, for his 32 years of service to the House and the United States Government he has given us. Twenty-two years of that has come right here on our House floor, 6 years as an assistant enrolling clerk and 16 years as an assistant journal clerk.

During his years of service, Mr. Fowler has exhibited a deep appreciation for the value of the legislative process in its purest form, that of the parliamentary actions of the House. Mr. Fowler's devotion to the language of the House Journal, or "journalese," as he calls it, is well known. Wayne never forgot to remind his colleagues that this style of prose has been in use in the House Journal since the second Continental Congress, and that the Constitution mandates the keeping of the House Journal, which is the official record of House proceedings.

Wayne Fowler is a true renaissance man. He is a lover of art, music, and literature. He is an avid bicyclist, which keeps him in such good shape. He is also known to his co-workers as someone who believes in empowering and supporting the work of the young people who also serve this House. He could often be found explaining the procedures of the House to the House pages, something they would never forget, and many of them might go on to become Members of this House and continue to remember that.

Mr. Fowler serves as the vergers at St. Columbus Episcopal Church, where he is responsible for the order of the liturgy and for training and supervising the acolytes.

I want to congratulate Wayne. I want to offer my best wishes to him, to his wife, Anona, their two sons, Wayne and Perry, and their wives, Leslie and Amber. We miss you, Wayne, but we wish you the best in your new adventure, and we thank you for your dedicated service to our House of Representatives and to our great country. Come back and visit.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 2495

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be deleted as a cosponsor of H.R. 2495.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia? There was no objection.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET PLAN THREATENS TO BRING BACK HUGE FEDERAL DEFICITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for no more than 20 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that this week we heard some remarkable news come out of the Congressional Budget Office. The Congressional Budget Office reported that we will see this year an \$8 billion surplus, and I think that is remarkable news for our country, and it is noteworthy to say that a lot of that progress has been made just in the last few years.

I noticed here as I looked back at the 1995 projected deficit, the 1996 projected deficit, and the 1997 projected deficit,

that as recently as 1995 the projection was that the deficit this year would be \$164 billion, in 1996 it was going to be \$107 billion, and in 1997, \$22 billion, is what it actually ended up being, and this year we actually have erased the red ink and we are operating in the black.

That is a remarkable achievement, considering from where we have come in these past few years. That is the good news. I think we ought to all reflect on the fact that that is good news. I think, again, it marks the first time in 30 years we have been able to operate in the black, and it is a tribute to the fiscal discipline that has been exercised by the Congress in the last couple of years in trying to get Federal spending under control.

The bad news, of course, is the fact that after years of hard work to eliminate these deficits, President Clinton wants to send the Federal budget back into the red. That is what is shown also in the analysis of the President's budget which was released yesterday by the Congressional Budget Office. The President's plan breaks the budget and breaks the agreement that we just reached this last year. Worst of all, it breaks faith with the American people.

It took us since 1969, when the first man walked on the Moon, to bring the Federal budget into balance. The President's plan will bring back deficits in just 2 short years. We should have expected that, because the President has proposed some 85 new initiatives costing \$150 billion over the next 5 years.

In addition, he has proposed increasing taxes to their highest level on our society since 1945. Any budget that returns us to the era of more taxes, more spending, and deficits, even for one year, is unacceptable. I think we treated the President's budget with courtesy when it was received on the Hill but declared it dead on arrival, and I think CBO's findings should certainly slam the coffin lid shut on this ill-conceived plan which threatens to wipe out all the progress we have worked so hard to make in bringing down Federal spending and eliminating Federal deficits.

There is an \$8 billion surplus in 1998, a remarkable achievement, and I think that hopefully we can continue down that track to build on surpluses in the future. The other part of the bad news, of course, in all this debate and discussion is the fact that even though we are operating in the black this year on a unified basis, budgetary basis, we still have \$5.5 trillion in debt that we have racked up over the last several years. We need, I think, again, to put a plan in place to retire that debt.

One of the things that we have looked very seriously at, and in fact I have cosponsored, is a plan that has been offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. NEUMANN) which would deal with that very issue. If we can assist and in a systematic way get the discipline that is necessary to reduce

the debt over time, we will also eliminate the \$250 billion that we spend annually just to pay interest on the debt.

If we think about the drain on the economy, the drain on the taxpayers of this country, to write a check every year through the appropriations process before we fund anything else, roads and bridges, education, defense, any other priority, the \$250 billion comes off the top to pay the interest on this \$5.5 trillion debt. That is a very serious problem and one we need to come to grips with.

Having said that, I have cosponsored a plan which will address that. It does it in a very simple way. First of all, it says that any time we run a surplus in this country, that we ought to take two-thirds of that surplus and dedicate it to paying down the debt, to retiring the debt, and secondly, to restoring the trust funds: the Social Security trust fund, the highway trust fund, the environmental trust funds. That has to be the priority, first of all, to deal with those issues. Then finally, the last third would be used to lower taxes on the hardworking people of this country.

But it basically makes a statement, an assertion, that we will not commit ourselves to embark down a path or journey down the road towards additional Washington spending and new Washington programs, until first we have taken care of the debt that is looming out there, and that is going to choke off future generations; that we have addressed the trust fund issues and ensured that Social Security will be there, not only for people who depend upon it today, but also in the future. Then finally, that we give something back to the taxpayers, after all, whose money it is in the first place. I believe that is a very logical, commonsensical approach to dealing with the potential surplus.

Furthermore, this plan over time would completely eliminate the debt by saying that over the course of the next several years we will not spend any more than 99 percent of the revenue that the government collects. In other words, each year we will run a 1 percent surplus that will be directly applied to the debt, so that over time, based upon current economic assumptions, we can, by the year 2026, systematically do away with the debt that is hanging like a cloud over our country's future.

So I believe it is a plan that merits the consideration, the debate, of this body, and hopefully the support on both sides of the aisle, because realistically, I think we have all proven in the past that Congress does not have the discipline, short of a plan like this, that will enable us to deal with the debt and also to continue to keep Federal spending under control.

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Any time in Washington we start talking surplus, we have all kinds of

people who have ways of spending it. And I think, again, it is something that may be a liberal politician's dream to talk surpluses, but it should be the taxpayers' nightmare.

We need to have a plan in place which addresses that not only for the short term but for the long term, and this legislation, H.R. 2191, the Debt Repayment Act, deals with that very issue.

Having said that, I also believe that in terms of the longevity of Social Security and where we need to be going with respect to that program, that we need some serious fundamental reforms. I think for the first time in a long time in a bipartisan way we are talking about the looming crisis that is ahead of us, and I find that to be very encouraging.

The fact of the matter is, as well, that we also borrow each year about \$100 billion from the Social Security Trust Fund and use it, apply it to the overall budget. It makes the budget deficit look smaller. But this year to the extent that we have done that, \$100 billion has been used out of the Social Security Trust Fund to mask the true size of the Federal deficit. \$650 billion has been borrowed from the Social Security trust fund and applied to the overall cost of running the government.

That is an issue that I also think we need to address, and erect a fire wall between the trust fund and the general budget so that in the future the people that pay into the Social Security Trust Fund through payroll tax have an assurance that their dollars are going to be used for the purpose they were intended. That should be a matter of practice and policy, that we have truth in budgeting and that we have accountability from our government and that no Social Security dollars are robbed to pay for new Washington spending. I think that is what we have been doing these last many years, and that is a practice which certainly needs to be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, as we move into this discussion of potential budget surpluses, it is again very important that we deal with the long-range issues, the debt, the trust funds. But before we again embark upon long-term new spending for government programs, we must do a serious evaluation about what is in the best interest of the people in this country who have needs.

As I travel my State of South Dakota, I hear a lot of different concerns. I talk to young families, husbands and wives who are trying very hard to juggle jobs and schedules so that they can pay the bills, pay for day care, think about their children's education, look at retirement issues, what they can do to put some aside, and then hope to have enough time to see their kids and each other at the end of the week.

I talk to college students who are taking full loads of classes plus trying to work on top of that, 40 hours a week in some cases, in order to pay for their

education. I talk to retired senior citizens who are concerned because they see what Washington is doing with the Social Security and Medicare programs, and they want to see that those programs are there not only for them but there for their children and grandchildren.

I talk to young professionals who are starting out their careers and who laugh when asked if they think that Social Security will be there for them when they retire. That question was recently asked of young people in this country, and the survey results found that more people believe in UFOs than believe that Social Security is going to be around for retirement.

We may have today a budget surplus, but we have some serious challenges ahead of us and ones which I think we need to come to grips with. It is going to take continued fiscal discipline along the lines of the plan that I have just been discussing.

When we look beyond those issues at whether or not, in terms of addressing society's needs out there, whether it is child care or education or retirement or health care, should we create new Washington-based programs to address those. Or should we say, again as a matter of fundamental policy, that we believe the people of this country are in a better position to make decisions about how to meet their needs, and therefore we ought to give more money back to them in the form of tax relief. I think that is a very clear choice.

We ought to allow the people of this country to participate in the benefits of a growing economy. When we look at where the American economy is today and the tax burden that we place on Americans, as I noted earlier in terms of the overall tax burden, entirely in terms of tax revenues collected, we are now approaching right at 20 percent of the total gross domestic product of our entire economy going in the form of tax revenues. The highest level since 1945. That is the collective burden.

How that plays out with individuals and families, when we sit down and figure it out, there were some statistics that came out the other day which said that over the past couple of decades that the tax burden has grown, the collective burden, Federal, State and local, to 38.2 percent. That is a remarkable number, when we think that 38 cents out of every dollar that a family in this country makes is going to pay taxes in one form or another.

Again, I think it ought to be a goal and it has been a goal articulated by our majority, the Republican leadership in the Congress, that we ought to work toward a 25 percent tax burden. Federal, State and local taxes should not exceed 25 percent of a family's income.

Mr. Speaker, I think that ought to be more than a goal and we ought to systematically work to where that becomes a reality. Someone said that God only asks for 10 percent, certainly the government could get by on two-

and-a-half times that amount, so 25 percent ought to be the goal that we strive for.

Before we go back into the budget wilderness that we have been wandering in for the last 30 years, we ought to look at what we can do to return some of the dollars that the people in this country who are very hard-working and are contributing and making this economy grow, how we can give some of that back to them in the form of tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced a couple of pieces of legislation which I think are consistent with that principle, and also address the issue of tax relief in a way which I think is consistent with what certainly is my philosophy and I would hope would be the philosophy of most Americans; that is that we ought to allow everybody to participate as much as they can in a very broad-based way in the benefits of a growing economy. That is one of the principles that underscores our legislation.

Secondly, to the extent that we can provide any form of tax relief in this body, that we ought to do it in a way that further simplifies, not complicates, the Tax Code. Every time the Congress touches the Tax Code, as they have repeatedly since 1986, which was supposed to be the tax reform movement to end all tax reforms, we have had some 4,000 modifications to the Tax Code in this country. More laws, more regulations, more rules, more pages of instruction to the point that today we have 34½ pounds of laws, regulations and rules and instructions, 480 tax forms. It becomes increasingly more complicated.

If we could do something that would liberate the people of this country, the individuals, the families, the businesses, from the burden that is imposed by just the complexity of this Tax Code, I think we would create more jobs, we would see the economy continue to grow even faster, because it is an incredible drag on the economy to see what we do in terms of our tax policy.

But having said that, let me briefly describe the nature of our two tax bills. First of all, we have said that one of the ways we can deliver tax relief is by raising the personal exemption. Everybody in this country claims a personal exemption and then one for their dependents. We would raise that from the current \$2,700 to \$3,400, thereby reducing the taxable income that each individual and each family in this country is responsible for.

If a taxpayer is paying at the 15 percent category and they are a family of four, that is going to amount to \$400 of tax relief. For someone in the 28 percent tax bracket, that is \$800 of tax relief each year. That is real relief. That allows people in this country to make real choices about what their priorities are and how they want to spend those tax dollars. If it is on child care, they could buy 12 weeks of child care with

that, or 16 weeks of groceries. They could make a couple of mortgage payments or car payments, or start putting something aside for education. That is real relief for working Americans. That is the philosophy that we bring to this.

The second bill is also geared toward the concept of simplifying the code, moving more people into the 15 percent tax bracket. It would raise the income thresholds at which the 28 percent rate applies today. For example, for a married couple that is currently \$42,350; we would raise that to \$70,000. So, in other words, they could make \$70,000 before they start paying taxes at the 28 percent level as opposed to the 15 percent level.

Mr. Speaker, that gives people in this country an incentive to work harder, to earn more, to improve their lot in life because they know that each time they earn an additional dollar, they are only going to have 15 cents taken in taxes as opposed to a higher 28 cents if they fall into that tax category.

What our legislation does is it drops 10 million filers out of the higher 28 percent bracket down into the 15 percent bracket, thereby lowering their tax bracket on average about \$1,200 on average per filer. Mr. Speaker, 29 million people in this country would see their tax bills lowered as a result of our legislation.

These are bills that bring real relief and real choices to working families in this country. They do it, as I said earlier, in a way that delivers relief in a broad-based way. People in the lower and middle income categories realize the biggest proportionate share of the tax relief, but everybody up through the income structure, rate structure, will realize tax relief, and that is significant because it gets us away from this notion of targeting and picking winners and losers out of Washington.

I think a big mistake in tax policy in the past is that we try to micromanage behavior. We try to say to people if they will behave this way or jump through these hoops, that we will reward them. We in Washington will reward them by giving them some form of tax relief.

Our bills, on the other hand, are consistent with the philosophy that says that in an equal way, everybody in this country, whether they are single or whether they are married or whether they have children or whatever their status is, if they are a working person who pays taxes, they get tax relief. That is straightforward and simple and common sense. It delivers tax relief in a way that is consistent with our principles and philosophy.

Recently I was reading a Wall Street Journal op-ed piece by Charles Murray on Friday, February 20, which reinforces this philosophy. What he says is, "The power of incentives to affect behavior is not at issue, nor is the power of government to effect incentives. But just as the information needed to organize an economy is too complex for

central economic planners to collect and use, so are the incentives that shape human behavior too complex for central planners to engineer. The legislators write a law that pushes policy lever A and opens spending valve B, and they may indeed produce a measurable behavioral output. But it usually has no relationship to the intended output, or worse, it is the exact opposite."

Mr. Speaker, I think as we head down the road in looking again at any kind of tax relief that we might be able to do this year or next year, whenever the budget situation that we are dealing with enables us to do that, we ought to be looking at tax relief that is consistent with the principles that are outlined in our legislation.

I want to credit the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DUNN), who is an original cosponsor, in helping me with this legislation. The gentlewoman is a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means, a member of the House leadership, and we have since that time added several cosponsors. We are going to continue to advance this particular proposal in a way that again I think will resonate with the American people, the people who pay the taxes, and hopefully will draw the attention of policymakers here in Washington.

I would just like to, in winding up today, point out the favorable review it is meeting with in my home State of South Dakota. Look at the Brookings Register, the editorial, "In Thune, Taxpayers Should Trust." I do not think that is a reflection on me, but it is the proposal that we have outlined and one that they said is very much consistent with principles.

The Mitchell Daily Republic, "Thune Tax Plan is Real Tax Relief." That is the kind of reviews our proposal is meeting with back home. And out here, in New York, Investor's Business Daily calls it "real tax relief." This is the kind of response that we are meeting with.

Again, I think it is very, very much in line with where we ought to be going in this country in terms of tax policy, again with the long-term goal in the year 2000 of coming up with a new Tax Code for a new century. That is where we ultimately need to be.

I am going to continue to advocate for tax reform. But until we get there, to the extent that we are able to offer tax relief, it ought to be consistent with the legislation that we have introduced. I look forward to working with other Members of this body to see that this becomes a reality.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. QUINN (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for today on account of dental reasons.